

# Dementia education on risk inspires people in midlife to consider healthier lifestyles

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75 percent of people said advice on dementia risk reduction would encourage them to adopt a healthier lifestyle. Three quarters of people in midlife would make lifestyle changes now to reduce their risk of developing dementia in future, the UK's biggest dementia charities have found. The news follows a pilot of dementia risk reduction messaging in NHS Health Checks for those aged 40-64.

The findings reflect the increasing public appetite to understand modifiable [dementia](#) risks and the benefits of including this information as part of existing programmes to help people manage their [health](#). For the first time ever, a single approach to deliver advice to 40-64-year-olds on how to reduce dementia [risk](#) via local health professionals has been developed through a pilot study in England.

In a joint effort to reduce the number of people developing dementia, Alzheimer's Research UK, Alzheimer's Society and Public Health England piloted the delivery of this information across Manchester City, Bury, Southampton City and Birmingham as part of the NHS Health Check programme – a free health check-up for adults in England aged 40-74, designed to reduce their risk of stroke, kidney disease, heart disease, type 2 diabetes or dementia.

The results, published in a report today, showed promise in shifting public awareness and understanding of dementia risk. The report showed 75 percent of the 164 people who remembered the advice on dementia risk said they were more likely to adopt a healthy lifestyle to reduce the

risk of developing dementia, while 80 percent said the advice would have some impact on their behaviour.

Focussing on the message 'what's good for your heart is good for your brain', the advice delivered through the health check included highlighting the benefits of stopping smoking, being physically active, eating healthily, maintaining a healthy weight, drinking less alcohol, connecting with people and keeping mentally active.

The results come in the wake of research commissioned by The Lancet, which found that over one third of global dementia cases could potentially be prevented by eliminating nine modifiable risk factors. Several of these risk factors are thought to have the greatest impact during midlife. However, there is concern that people do not understand how to translate this information into individual lifestyle changes.

The charities are now calling for dementia risk reduction messaging to become mandatory in NHS Health Checks for people aged between 40-64. More than 1.3 million NHS Health Checks were delivered in England last year, with a significant proportion provided to people who were in midlife (age 40 – 64). This group has the biggest opportunity to make changes now that could later reduce their risk of dementia.

There are 850,000 people with dementia in the UK, and this figure is set to rise to one million within the next few years. The project demonstrates the unified approach across the third and statutory sectors to tackle the biggest health crisis of our time.

Andy Morris, 54, whose mum developed dementia in her early 70s, said:

"Having seen personally the impact of dementia through my mum who is living with [vascular dementia](#), I fully support the dementia component of the NHS Health Checks being aimed at younger people so they can take

steps to reduce their risk of developing this devastating condition. Not enough people are aware of what dementia is, how it affects people, and even more so how it affects family and friends and we need to find the right way to talk to them about this.

"Running became a big relief for me while caring for my parents and I regularly run long distances after work to relax, but not everyone has to go that far. It could be something simple like attending a weekly parkrun, which already provides more than 100,000 people per week in the UK with much needed exercise along with valuable social interaction. And simple steps like eating healthily and going for a daily walk could make a big difference to your risk of dementia and other health conditions, such as heart problems and diabetes."

Dr David Reynolds, Chief Scientific Officer at Alzheimer's Research UK, said:

"Dementia is not an inevitable part of ageing and we now know that there are steps we can all take to reduce our risk. As evidence about dementia risk factors grows, we must arm the public with this knowledge and the NHS Health Check is a perfect platform to do this. The results of our pilot study show that there is a strong public desire for dementia risk reduction information, and that people are willing to act on it too – which is why we hope to see this approach rolled out nationally. If we can reach people in midlife now, when there's a real window of opportunity to impact dementia risk; imagine the difference we could make to the number of people living with dementia in future."

Jeremy Hughes, Chief Executive at Alzheimer's Society, said:

"Alarming, half of people we spoke to think there's absolutely nothing you can do to prevent your risk of dementia. It's great the NHS has already been equipping over 65s with ways to reduce their risk when

they have annual check-ups. But, in terms of having the greatest impact on reducing dementia risk, we've been missing the boat. Dementia takes hold of the brain decades before symptoms appear, so empowering people to get fit and eat healthier from age 40 is crucial if we're to reduce the number of [people](#) developing the condition.

"In the absence of a cure, risk reduction is a vital tool to fight dementia. With the condition set to be the 21st century's biggest killer, it's important that as a nation we unite against dementia and each of us do what we can to reduce our risk."

Provided by Alzheimer's Research UK

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